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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001658

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DEPT FOR AF/W, INR
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [KDEM](#) [KCOR](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NORTHERN RULER ON YAR'ADUA'S INITIAL STRATEGIES

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Cheryl Fernandes for reasons
1.4. (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Northern tribal leader Bashani Aminu decribed Yar'adua's attempts to "disentangle" Obasanjo from the new administration. Aminu maintains Yar'adua succeeded in working behind the scenes to keep Bode Augusto, Obasanjo's lead supporter, out of the cabinet and that Yar'adua has placed key allies in the cabinet to further help remove Obasanjo's influence. Yar'adua's decision to overturn the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refinery sales was an assertion of his independence and Aminu expects more of the same soon -- particularly an overturn of the Transcorp purchase of the Abuja Nicon Hilton. Aminu also noted Yar'adua's commitment to fighting corruption and told Post he gave the greenlight to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to investigate anyone. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Poloff and PolAssistant met with Alhaji Bashani Aminu, District Head of Sabon Gari and Senior Counselor in the Zaria Emirate with the title Iyan Zazzau (a traditional title bestowed to princes in the Zaria Emirate). Aminu is well-connected and, as a traditional ruler from the North, has been part of the small group of northern rulers whom Yar'adua has consulted as he seeks to set the tone for his administration. Aminu noted Yar'adua called the tribal leaders to Abuja for just such a meeting on August 1, to discuss constitutional amendments. According to Aminu, Yar'adua wants to move forward on constitutional amendments that were defeated along with the third term amendment. (Those other than the third term amendment, that is.)

DISENTANGLING OBASANJO

13. (C) Aminu told Emboffs the tribal leaders have met several times with Yar'adua since he took office, discussing political and economic issues including the ministerial list and poverty reduction strategies. The rulers advised Yar'adua that he needs to pull away (or "disentangle" as Aminu put it) from Obasanjo and gain the legitimacy not provided by the elections through solid policy that benefits the people. In particular, they suggested he focus initially on job creation, electricity, development of the agricultural sector and Niger Delta security.

14. (C) Aminu maintained Yar'adua is treading carefully as he moves to limit Obasanjo's control. Nigerians will not see the "street fight" many are hoping for, Aminu told us, but Yar'adua will be introducing radical changes over the next six months to curb Obasanjo's influence. According to Aminu, Bode Augusto's failure to obtain Senate confirmation was one of Yar'adua's calculated moves. Augusto was slated to be Minister of Finance and Aminu maintained he was to lead Obasanjo's loyalists in the cabinet. Aminu told Poloff Yar'adua worked quietly behind the scenes, convincing the Senate to reject his nomination so that Obasanjo could not blame Yar'adua for the rejection. Aminu maintains that Yar'adua has succeeded in placing a handful of key allies and seasoned politicians within the cabinet to assist in removing Obasanjo's influence -- he specifically mentioned Gambo Jimeta, former Inspector General of Police and National Security Advisor, as one of those allies. The few ministers that Obasanjo succeeded at placing in the cabinet will be out within a couple of months, according to Aminu.

15. (C) Aminu linked the decision to overturn the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refinery sales to Yar'adua's assertion of independence. He said to expect more such deals to be overturned. In particular, he maintained Yar'adua will overturn deals where Obasanjo was directly involved and one of the primary beneficiaries. He predicted Yar'adua will overturn the Transcorp purchase of the Abuja Hilton soon. These deals will be aimed at removing the ill-earned gains of Obasanjo and his close allies such as Aliko Dangote.

(NOTE: Dangote and Obasanjo's Transcorp were both part of the consortium that purchased the Port Harcourt and Kaduna refineries.) Aminu claimed Dangote gave Obasanjo a 35 million USD jet plane as a recent "gift."

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YAR'ADUA GIVES EFCC GREENLIGHT

16. (C) Aminu also noted Yar'adua's commitment to fighting corruption. According to Aminu, Yar'adua summoned Economic and Financial Crimes Commission Chair Malam Nuhu Ribadu to the villa and gave him the greenlight to investigate and charge any/corrupt officials -- "everyone is fair game." The only stipulation that Aminu said Yar'adua placed was that no one be detained beyond what is allowed by law. (Aminu said Yar'adua told Ribadu to finish his investigations and be ready to turn the case to the courts before making his arrests.) Aminu said Yar'adua also summoned International Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) Chairman Emmanuel Ayoola to express his disappointment with ICPC's lack of action against corruption and demand better performance. COMMENT. Post has noted a significant increase in public statements and information on ongoing investigations from ICPC officers over the past weeks, a likely result of Yar'adua's reprimand.
END COMMENT.

17. (C) COMMENT: If Aminu is correct in his assertion that Yar'adua is slowly and deliberately "disentangling" Obasanjo from the administration, it will likely earn him some of the legitimacy he so desires. The public sentiment before the elections -- that any outcome is acceptable, as long as Obasanjo leaves -- continues today, as many see Obasanjo still pulling the strings from his perch in the PDP. Given Obasanjo's long tentacles of influence, the job of disentangling will be considerable and a 6-month timeframe for completion may be overly optimistic. Viewed within the framework of Aminu's discussion with Poloffs though, Yar'adua may well be slowly picking his way down the path to becoming an independent leader. END COMMENT.
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